

## Language textbooks and popular geopolitics

Representations of the world and (post)colonial history in English and French

Risager, Karen

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# Language Textbooks and Popular Geopolitics: Representations of the World and (Post)colonial History in English and French

**Karen Risager**

Roskilde University

risager@ruc.dk

## Abstract

This article discusses how language textbooks may be fruitful for the study of popular geopolitics. It contains a comparative analysis of two textbooks used in lower secondary education in Denmark: *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*. Their representations of the world and their narratives of colonial history are very different in many respects (apart from the obvious differences related to the different geographical areas affected by British and French colonialism). In particular, their treatment of Africa is very different.

The analysis draws on my book from 2018: *Representations of the World in Language Textbooks*. That book presents and implements a number of different theoretical approaches to the analysis of representations of the world (the entire planet) in language textbooks. Among them are the following, which are also used in this article: national studies (which countries are represented in the textbook?), transnational studies (which transnational connections are represented?) and postcolonial studies (is history, particularly (post)colonial history, represented?).

In addition to the comparison itself, the article discusses the possible reasons behind the two different narratives of the world and world history. Generally, the analysis shows that it is important to be aware of the differences among the various languages in which popular geopolitics is modelled. Languages are differently positioned in the global linguistic landscape that has developed as a result of world history, and there are also different political perspectives on that.

**Keywords:** Textbooks, cultural representations, postcolonial studies, the teaching of English, the teaching of French

## 1. Language textbooks and popular geopolitics

Language textbooks constitute a specific kind of documents that may be very fruitful for the study of popular geopolitics. Language textbooks and other learning materials for the teaching of foreign languages exhibit a variety of texts and images that represent places, people, everyday life, cultural and social diversity, and they implicitly communicate certain views of the world.

Textbooks are part of the social practice of education. They are produced with the aim of being tools for students' development of the knowledge and skills required in official guidelines concerning the different subjects and the school in general. In language teaching, textbooks today often have a dual purpose: Firstly, they contribute to students' learning of the target language, say French or Chinese, and thereby help them develop

their communicative competence in the target language. Secondly, they contribute to students' development of knowledge (understanding, reflection) about target-language countries, say French-speaking or Chinese-speaking countries and areas. Thus, language textbooks are expected to offer input to students' development of intercultural competence, their ability to navigate in a culturally complex world.

An important point is that, in the production of a language textbook, the first purpose (contributing to the development of communicative competence) is always dealt with by a language specialist or a very experienced language teacher. Whereas the second purpose (contributing to the development of intercultural competence) is typically not dealt with by a specialist such as an anthropologist, sociologist, geographer, historian, etc., but by the same person as above: the language (and literature) specialist. This means that the cultural content of the textbook is typically selected and written by people who are naturally very much influenced by common-sense views of the world in everyday discourse and popular culture, i.e. by different strands of popular geopolitics.

A language textbook, especially as a product in paper format, presents itself as a structured and unified entity, but it is usually also characterised by great diversity, as it is composed of texts and images of many different genres: for example, invented conversations, portraits of people of different colours, instructions for the students, songs, drawings of house interiors, extracts of short stories, maps, blogs, jokes, drawings of young people on a sunny beach, photos of monuments. So, the view of the world may be quite kaleidoscopic. Nevertheless, we also see attempts at a more systematic teaching about culture and society (see below).

Another characteristic of language textbooks is their emphasis on the contemporary world, which is related to their main purpose: to help students develop their communicative competence in the target language, orally and in reading/writing, in the here and now of our world today – or in the near future. This emphasis on the contemporary world means that some language textbooks contain very little or nothing that could serve as historical explanation of the contemporary situation, including the history of target-language countries, whether national or international and (post)colonial.

Below, two language textbooks are analysed and compared with regard to their representations of the world and colonial history. They are textbooks for English and French respectively, used in Denmark in lower secondary education with students of 13–16 years of age.

## **2. Analysing culture in language textbooks: the research field**

In the general field of studies focusing on the cultural dimensions of language teaching (Kramsch 1993; Guilherme 2002; Risager 2007; Byram 2008; Kramsch & Whiteside 2008), the analysis of culture in textbooks is a specialised field, developed since the 1980s.

It is an interdisciplinary field in which many theories and methods are used. A more or less common trend, especially in the years up to about 2000, is to make structured descriptions of the images of the target-language country or countries (Risager 1991; Byram 1993; Sercu 2000). The method used is often a combination of content analysis (counting items like words or themes) and more comprehensive critical reading. After

2000 more approaches and methods have been introduced, for example enunciation analysis (focusing on national identity and on the relationship between the textbook writer and the student) (Auger 2007) and social-semiotic analysis of the textbook as a multimodal product (Weninger & Kiss 2013; Chapelle 2016). A number of researchers have formulated an explicit critique of the role of language textbooks in political economy, reflecting on the production and reception of textbooks in terms of power and ideology, and on their cultural content seen in the light of dominant neoliberalism on global markets (Kramsch 1987; Gray 2010, 2013; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger 2015; Kramsch & Vinall 2015; Bori 2018). They usually rely on some form of critical discourse analysis. Some have put a special focus on how textbooks deal with history (Maijala 2004), including colonial history (Vinall 2012; Risager 2018).

This article draws on Risager 2018, in which I take a global (world) perspective, and propose and exploit five different culture-theoretical approaches to language textbook analysis: national studies (Billig 1995), citizenship education studies (Byram 2008), Cultural studies (Hall 1997), postcolonial studies (Said 1978; Santos 2014) and transnational studies (Hannerz 1992). In this article, three of these come into play:

- national studies, in which the focus is on the country (structure, people, places, national identity) and the selection of countries in the world.
- transnational studies, in which the focus is on connections that go beyond and cut across countries (international/transnational organisations, flows of ideas, mobility and migration, digital communication, climate issues).
- postcolonial studies, in which the focus is on colonialism, colonisations and postcolonial/decolonial issues.

### **3. Languages and language teaching in a global perspective**

Before I proceed with the analysis, I want to elaborate briefly on the global perspective underlying the approach in Risager 2018. The point of departure is the idea of the whole world, the planet, with all its continents and oceans, flora and fauna, human communities, practices and identities: An interdependent and multicultural world (the following sections draw on Risager 2020).

Languages, not least the languages that are taught as foreign languages, are global phenomena. English, French, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish or German are not only spoken in specific countries as first or second language, but also as foreign languages in educational and academic contexts in a great many other countries, and as *lingua francas* in professional and everyday life in various contexts all over the world, i.e. used as a common medium of communication between people who have no other common language. A language like German, for example, is not only spoken in the German-speaking countries, but also by German-speaking tourists, students, business people, diplomats, pensioners, German teachers, engineers, doctors, musicians, etc. all over the world. German language may be used as a *lingua franca* in many parts of the world: For example, German might be used as a common language by Turkish and Greek tourists in China, who have been living in Germany. Moreover, German-language media content may be received, and produced, in most parts of the world. It should also be noted that

there are books and other texts in German on innumerable topics. Thus, one can very well gain insights into e.g. Vietnam and its history through texts in, say, German. One may learn about the whole world through any of the larger national or official languages of the world.

At the same time, it should also be noted that a great advantage of language learning is that it may offer new perspectives on the world, both because it is a new language for the learner, and because the language in question has developed in other parts of Europe or the world, characterised by particular geographical conditions, historical experiences and ideas. Learning English, French, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish or German may lead to the awareness that there are other perspectives on the world (e.g. Vietnam and its history) than that or those of the students themselves. The perspective may be related to discourses circulating in the particular language communities (for example discourses on the historical role of the cultivation of rice in Vietnam), or it may be more clearly related to the semantic structure and use of the languages in question (their linguaculture, Risager 2015) (e.g. connotations of 'rice' in English as partly different from its translations into German or Vietnamese).

Thus, when one learns English or French, the languages referred to in this article, one learns a language that is a 'world language' in the sense that it *may be used*, in certain contexts, all over the world as first, second or foreign language or as a lingua franca.

The global perspective is also applicable to the cultural dimensions of foreign language teaching. If the aim of foreign language teaching in general education is not only learning to communicate in the target language, but also to develop insights into culture and society, it is traditionally (since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) understood as referring to target-language countries only, i.e. the countries where the target language is the dominating first language (like Britain or Ireland in the case of English) or official language with important functions in, for example, education (like India or Nigeria). Most often the teaching will focus on the most central or powerful countries (like the United States and Britain in English teaching, France in French teaching, etc.) But if one only looks at these countries (states) as isolated entities, each with its own national institutions and national culture, one does not get a grasp of the interdependence of all regions and countries in the modern globalised world. France, for example, is deeply integrated in the rest of the world, being a member of the EU, NATO, the UN, OECD, G7 and G20, and countless other international organisations and fora. It is linked to other parts of the world through special relationships with former colonies, by global trade and all other kinds of cooperation, and by being integrated in transnational migration networks. Thus, when one learns about one of the target-language countries (which are, by the way, all multilingual), it should not be forgotten that this country is a player on the world scene.

## 4. Methodology and main questions

### 4.1. Choice of languages

The selection of English and French in this article can be explained in the following way:

I live and work in Denmark, so the first reason is purely practical. I take my point of departure in the Danish school system, in which the hierarchy among foreign languages is English – German/French, and after that a number of other languages. English is obligatory from grade 1 and students must choose between German and French in grade 5. Thus, I chose two important languages in the Danish school system. Denmark is located outside the Anglosphere and the Francophonie, so English and French are both foreign languages in Denmark. This is one of the results of the fact that Denmark was never colonised by Great Britain or France or any other power. Denmark was itself among the European colonial powers, and still has certain dominance over Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

But why French and not German? Since my research interest in this article includes an investigation of the representation of colonial history, the British and the French empires are relatively comparable. For centuries, they competed for power over North America, Africa, South/Southeast Asia and the Middle East (West Asia), and as late as after World War II, they were colonial empires dominating very large parts of the world (only the Soviet Union lasted longer). Germany has also been a colonial power, but only for a shorter period of time, and it lost all its colonies after World War I.

### 4.2. Choice of textbooks

The two textbooks: *A Piece of Cake* (Boesen & Rosendal 2011) and *Français Formidable* [Fabulous French] (Brandelius, Sundell & Aktor 2010–2013) were included in the analyses in Risager 2018. They are both for young people in lower secondary school, grades 7–9, age 13–16, that is, at an age where students are beginning to develop their identities as citizens, also global citizens. The students for whom the English textbook was published (in 2011), started English lessons in grade 3 (or 2). The students for whom the French textbook was published (in 2010–2013), started in grade 7, so this is a beginner's book. (Since 2014, foreign languages start earlier in Denmark: English in class 1 and French/German in grade 5.) The two textbooks were originally produced in Sweden (which is quite frequent – there is a Scandinavian market for textbooks), and the editions dealt with in this article have both been produced by Alinea, a Danish publishing company.

### 4.3. Main questions of analysis

As already said, the analysis refers to national and transnational studies, which taken together offer a geographical perspective, and postcolonial studies, which offer a historical perspective. The main questions of analysis are the following:

- Which countries/nations of the world are represented in the textbooks?
- What transnational connections are represented?
- Is history, particularly (post)colonial history, represented?

#### 4.4. Method of analysis

The analysis is inspired by critical discourse analysis, and it is a macro-analysis in the sense that I do not look at particular texts and images, but read the textbook critically as one composite system. This analytical approach allows me to deal not only with what is written (or presented in visual form) but also – in the light of the global perspective explained above – with indirect messages, blind spots, silences. The comparative element of the analysis is organised in the following way: For each of the three main questions above, I present an analysis of *A Piece of Cake*, followed by an analysis of *Français Formidable* that emphasises how this textbook is different from *A Piece of Cake*. Afterwards, I discuss the differences in a more balanced way: How are the two textbooks different, and what might be the reasons for this? The following sections draw on Risager 2018.

#### 5. *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*: Overview of their chapters

*A Piece of Cake* is organised as a thematic syllabus (sociocultural themes, not grammatical themes) and intends to give students input of many different genres and topics that may contribute to their knowledge about the world. Each chapter is separate from the others. There are no central characters and no common storyline or plot. All texts (except some sections on grammar and lexis) are in English in the student's book as well as in the teacher's guide.

The chapters/themes have an average length of about 20 pages, and they are full of colour photos of (mostly anonymous) people and places. The titles of the chapters are indicated below, plus my notes in parentheses (Figure 1):

*A Piece of Cake*. All chapters (all chapters have a sociocultural theme)

##### Grade 7

1. Absolutely British (about Britain)
2. Witches, the occult and other scary stuff
3. The first Americans
4. Out and about (sports, including extreme sports)
5. Hawaii – the Aloha State
6. Spotlight on school (school in Britain and the United States)
7. Canada from sea to sea

##### Grade 8

1. Food, glorious food
2. Is anybody out there? (space, astronomy and astrology)
3. Nothing succeeds like success (celebrities and success as a young person)
4. Georgia on my mind (e.g. Martin Luther King and Coca Cola)
5. The environment – ignore it and it will go away
6. Music – our universal language
7. Global connections (about globalisation)

##### Grade 9

1. Next stop NYC (including the 9/11 terrorist attacks)
2. Events that shook the world (e.g. Titanic, Pearl Harbor)
3. A look at Ireland
4. Love is in the air (love and sexuality)
5. What's up down under (Australia)
6. Teen issues (poor and rich, race, religion)
7. Aspects of South Africa

Figure 1. *A Piece of Cake*. Overview of chapters

*Français Formidable*, which is a beginner's book, also has a thematic syllabus, but the themes do not all have a sociocultural focus. The chapters alternate between having a focus on communication (with themes related to the students' own lives and their school, health, leisure and sport in Denmark), or on grammar and vocabulary, or on culture and society (implicitly: not in Denmark). Most texts in the student's book are in French, and some are in Danish. The teacher's guide is in Danish.

The average length of chapters is 4 pages in grade 7, 6 pages in grade 8, and 15 pages in grade 9, and they are full of coloured drawings and photos of people and places (almost as much as in *A Piece of Cake*). The chapters dealing explicitly with culture and society (and whose titles are marked with a special colour in the textbooks), are distributed as follows (titles, and my notes added in parentheses) (Figure 2):

*Français Formidable*. Only those chapters that have a sociocultural theme.

Grade 7

*La géographie de la France I* (geography of France I) (cities, oceans, neighbouring countries)

*La géographie de la France II* (mountains, rivers, more on cities)

*Joyeux Noël!* (Merry Christmas!)

*L'histoire française I* (history of France I) (from the Celts to the Edict of Nantes 1598)

*L'histoire française II* (from Louis XIV to Napoleon, including the colonisations)

Grade 8

*La francophonie en Europe* (la francophonie in Europe)

*La francophonie dans le monde* (la francophonie in the world)

*Paris* (sights to visit)

*Info France* (tourism, agriculture, industry, government, religion, symbols)

*L'histoire française I* (history of France I) (the First and Second World Wars)

*L'histoire française II* (wars in Indochina and Algeria, May 68, Simone de Beauvoir)

*Le système éducatif* (the education system)

*Allons au cirque!* (let's go to the circus)

Grade 9

*En vacances* (on holiday)

*Être différent* (being different)

*Pour ou contre?* (for or against)

*La France dans le monde* (France in the world)

*La vie des jeunes* (the life of young people)

*Projets d'avenir* (plans for the future) (job, au pair, the Foreign Legion, Doctors Without Borders)

Figure 2. *Français Formidable*. Overview of chapters

There are no central characters and no plot in *Français Formidable*, but the history of France forms a kind of continued narrative during the first two years. The use of the terms 'geography' and 'history' in the titles indicates that there is *an intention of teaching* about the countries in question.



## 6. *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*: Which countries of the world are represented?

### 6.1. The term ‘target-language country’

First, we will look briefly at the term ‘target-language country’. It may be defined as a country in which the target language has important functions, whether it is the first language of the majority, or an official language or a language with specific functions in education and culture. What does this mean more concretely in relation to the English-speaking and the French-speaking worlds?

There are about 36 *countries* in the world that may be said to be English-speaking and therefore have the status of target-language countries in English teaching. It may be countries like Britain, India, Hong Kong and Ghana. As for French, there are 54 *members* of the OIF (*Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*) (OIF 2020). It may be countries like France, Senegal, Madagascar and Vietnam. When I refer to French-speaking countries or target-language countries in relation to French, I refer to these members of the OIF. (Note that although we call countries ‘English-speaking’ or ‘French-speaking’, they are in fact, as already said, multilingual, and English or French are by no means the dominant first language in all of them.)

### 6.2. A Piece of Cake

National studies focuses on the representation of individual countries and on the selection of countries to represent. ‘Countries’ is the default term in language teaching – in social and political science one would be more precise and use terms like state, nation-state, nation, etc. (in English). In this analysis, we will focus on the selection of countries.

In the following, ‘explicit treatment’ means that the country is the theme of a chapter or section; ‘passing reference’ means that the country is mentioned by name, but not focused at as such; and ‘indirect reference’ means that the country is not mentioned by name, but something is mentioned or shown that may be associated with it. For example, an image of the Eiffel Tower may be associated with Paris or France.

If we look at the explicit treatment of various countries in *A Piece of Cake*, nine chapters focus on particular countries or regions: First Britain (almost only London), then the USA (with a focus on Native Americans), Hawaii, Canada (including Quebec), Georgia, New York City, Ireland, Australia and at the end South Africa. See left column in Figure 3:

<i>A Piece of Cake: Which countries of the world are represented?</i>				
target-language countries			non-target-language countries	
explicit treatment	passing reference	indirect reference	passing reference	indirect reference
Britain, (mostly London) USA (continental) Hawaii Canada (incl. Quebec) Georgia New York City Ireland Australia South Africa	India Northern Ireland Scotland Zambia	Australia New Zealand Wales	Vietnam Fiji Thailand Cambodia Nepal	Japan France Netherlands Norway

Figure 3. *A Piece of Cake: Which countries of the world are represented?*

The chapters, however, do not deal systematically with the countries or regions but consist of different kinds of texts (fictional and factual – some written by the author) on various aspects that are usually not put in relation to one another. There are important blind spots and silences in the representations, for example: A number of religions are referred to, but Islam is hardly mentioned. Indigenous peoples (in the USA, Canada and Australia) get a lot of attention, and African Americans are sometimes represented. But when racism is mentioned now and then, it is only with reference to the past, not the present. Hispanics in the USA, on the other hand, are not mentioned at all (but in the volume for grade 5, Spanish language is briefly mentioned in a text on Miami).

If we look at more quick, passing references (see second column), there are some examples as regards English-speaking areas, for instance a fictional text on a village in India where there are plans of establishing a polluting plant (in the chapter on the environment), and a short reference to Belfast and to ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. There is also a text (a letter) on Scotland on the website, and a story of a Zambian student visiting an Australian school.

We also find indirect references (see third column), for example, a couple of indirect references to Australia (to be found outside the special chapter on Australia): an explanation of the expression ‘peach melba’ and a story about the life of a koala. New Zealand is indirectly referred to in an explanation of the name ‘Wellington’, and there are two small indirect references to Wales.

Taken together there is a clear focus on countries in which English is the first language of the majority (the Anglosphere), i.e. a clear focus on the Western world or the Global North (except the focus on indigenous peoples). Very large areas of the world in which English is an official language and is used in education, are left out more or less completely: Anglophone Africa (except South Africa), and India and Pakistan.

Besides target-language countries, other countries and regions are also referred to (see fourth column). Vietnam, Fiji, Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal are mentioned in passing in connection with a backpacker’s travels. And there are indirect references (fifth column)

to Japan (manga, karate, Pearl Harbor, atomic bombs), France (parkour), Netherlands (double Dutch) and Norway (the Nobel Peace Prize). But large areas are left out although English may be used as a lingua franca in some contexts all over the world: The whole of Latin America, China and most of Asia outside China, including Russia and the Middle East. Last, but not least, continental Europe is hardly mentioned at all, although English is the preferred lingua franca in most of Europe and one of the most important working languages in EU institutions. Denmark, as the country of learning, is very seldom mentioned.

So, although *A Piece of Cake* mentions a large number of countries and regions in the world, it clearly favours the Western world, and it has large blind spots: the whole of Latin America, most of Africa, large parts of Asia, and continental Europe. It should be stressed that the point is not that the textbook should cover still more countries, but that it is relevant and important for authors, teachers and students to be aware of the selection of countries and possibly take up discussions of what constitutes a fair and balanced selection if one is interested in the image of the world as a whole.

One might think that it is natural that a textbook like *A Piece of Cake* favours the Western world. It has been produced in the West, and most of the students may find it easy to identify with Western youth. But as we shall see below, *Français Formidable*, which is produced and used under the same circumstances, has a somewhat different take on this.

### 6.3. Français Formidable

The image of the world in the French textbook, *Français Formidable*, is very different from the one in *A Piece of Cake*. This is not only related to the obvious fact that the focus is on the French-speaking world rather than the English-speaking. The approach to knowledge about the world is much more systematic and globally oriented, and it includes both geography and history. Some facts and stories are given in French in the textbook for the students, others are given in longer texts in Danish in the teacher's guide.

If we look at the explicit treatment of various countries in *Français Formidable*, a number of countries are included (in this order), see Figure 4, left column:

<i>Français Formidable: Which countries of the world are represented?</i>				
target-language countries			non-target-language countries	
explicit treatment	passing reference	indirect reference	passing reference	indirect reference
France (not only Paris) Belgium Luxemburg Switzerland Canada/ Quebec Martinique Algeria Senegal Morocco Réunion Mali	Cameroon Chad Ivory Coast Tunisia Haiti Maghreb as a region  <i>World map:</i> Togo Niger Vietnam Cambodia Lebanon Madagascar French Guiana <i>and many others</i>	to Africa (?) (elephants, giraffes, rhinos, lions and others)	South Africa Italy Sweden Afghanistan Somalia Greece Scandinavia Australia USA Canada  <i>World map:</i> Russia New Zealand China <i>and many others</i>	to the Anglophone world (smoothie, curling, Facebook, Calvin Klein), to the Arab world (the Arab spring)

Figure 4. *Français Formidable: Which countries of the world are represented?*

In *Français Formidable*, one can see a clear pedagogical intention of giving students and teachers resources to develop a basic and coherent insight into the countries and cities that have been selected. The sections on countries include instructive geographical maps showing borders, neighbouring countries, cities, regions, mountains, rivers and oceans. The countries in question are often introduced by way of texts (written by the authors) of an encyclopedic nature, sometimes formulated in the genre of personal presentations, for example (translated into English): “My name is Naïma, I am from Algeria. Algeria is situated between Morocco and Tunisia in North Africa. My country is a former French colony, it has been independent since 1962. Our official language is Arabic ...” (*Français Formidable* 2A: 60). Concerning France, there are several factual texts in French for the students (about 10 lines each), and longer texts in Danish for the teacher (about 10-30 lines), dealing with basic facts of geography, society and culture (and history, see below): tourism, agriculture, industry, political and administrative system, school system, religion, and national symbols. And in contrast to *A Piece of Cake*, both migration and Islam are mentioned several times in *Français Formidable* (but not dealt with in depth).

If we look at more passing references (see second column), a great many target-language countries are mentioned in the various chapters. Moreover, on the back cover of the volumes for grades 8 and 9, there is a world map in colours (with French names) showing more target-language countries such as Togo, Niger, etc. Some more parts of the overseas French regions and territories are also shown, such as French Guiana (Guyane), and others.

Apparently, there are not many indirect references to other target-language countries, but (francophone?) Africa might be hinted at because there are some chapters that contain drawings of wild animals such as elephants, giraffes, rhinos and lions (third column).

Taken together, the focus in *Français Formidable* is clearly on French-speaking Europe and not least francophone Africa. A large proportion of all French-speaking countries have been included in one way or another. *Français Formidable* does not have an almost exclusive focus on the Western world as *A Piece of Cake* has.

Beside target-language countries, a large number of other countries are also referred to in *Français Formidable* on various occasions (see column four): South Africa, Italy, etc. (and Denmark for comparisons). The world map mentioned above also covers many non-target-language countries such as Russia, New Zealand, and China. Moreover, in grade 7 there is an exercise with eight national flags (UK, USA, Canada, and Spain – and Belgium, Morocco, Switzerland and France). And in a chapter on the weather, there is a map of Europe with many cities indicated.

There are indirect references, often to the English-speaking world, for example (column five): Loanwords from English, like smoothie and curling, brand names like Facebook and Calvin Klein, and a section on the Roller Events Friday Night in Paris ('Friday Night Fever'). The mentioning of the Arab spring may be seen as an indirect reference to the Arab countries as a whole.

Thus, *Français Formidable* is much more oriented towards the whole world, and towards Africa, than *A Piece of Cake*, and it supplies some resources for developing a comprehensive view of the world by means of the world map, which does not only show French-speaking countries but also others. The very different treatment of Africa in *A Piece of Cake* and in *Français Formidable* is telling, and will be discussed below.

One can see that in both *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*, Latin America (in the sense of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries) is totally absent. This is perhaps more understandable for the French textbook than for the English, as the English language is after all used quite a lot by Latin-Americans as a lingua franca for cross-continental communication with for example parts of the EU, Asia, Oceania and Anglophone Africa.

## **7. *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*: What transnational connections are represented?**

### **7.1. *A Piece of Cake***

Transnational studies focuses on the representation of connections that go beyond or cut across national borders, such as transnational (or international) organisations, flows of goods and ideas, migration, digital communication, climate issues and pandemics. It is important to include transnational studies in the language teaching field, because it is still to some extent bound to the traditional equation: language-culture-nation and the ensuing image of the world as consisting of a number of countries isolated from one another. A point of departure for the teaching may be the fact that we all live transnational lives: Most of us are leading an everyday life more or less influenced by diversity as a result of transnational processes: imported goods of all sorts, migration from many countries, information flows from many parts of the world, etc.

The transnational connections that are most prominent in *A Piece of Cake* are: Travelling, transnational digital communication, and (debates about) economic globalisation.

*A Piece of Cake* is full of allusions to travel. Many of the countries or regions are seen with the (middle-class) tourist's eye, and there are many texts written by travellers telling about their experiences. One example is a constructed interview about Vietnam with a 'global teenager', a 19-year-old Brit who has travelled for nine months around North America, Vancouver, Fiji, Australia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Nepal. This is a specific perspective on migration emphasising the free mobility of individual persons who have the resources to travel where they want, and who do not have passport problems. Darker sides of migration are also touched upon, for instance the forced relocations of indigenous tribes in the United States, and the waves of immigrants to the United States via Ellis Island. Other forms of migration or exodus, for example war migration or climate migration, are not mentioned, nor is it noted that for large parts of the world's population it is not possible to migrate at all, due to economic or political barriers.

Transnational digital communication and (debates about) economic globalisation are included in the chapter called 'Global connections', grade 8. One of the inputs is a photo assemblage entitled 'Globalization – like it or not!'. It shows six smiling young Indian women using phones and laptops together, surrounded by statements related to discussions about globalisation, such as "Restrictive governments can no longer stop information from reaching us" and "Jobs are being outsourced – causing unemployment at home" (*A Piece of Cake* 8: 132f).

As regards transnational organisations, *A Piece of Cake* deals briefly with The World Trade Organisation, the World Fair Trade Organisation, Greenpeace, and Rotary Youth Exchange. It also deals with Coca Cola as a transnational company originating in Georgia. On the other hand, there is no reference to the UN or the EU, or the Commonwealth (not even the Commonwealth Games, in light of the interest in sport). So, in terms of important transnational organisations, the textbook does not offer much. As regards climate issues, there are, in the chapter on the environment, references to flooding in Europe and to the hurricane Katrina in New Orleans – disasters that were intensely covered by the media.

## 7.2. Français Formidable

There is not much about transnational travelling, digital communication and economic globalisation in *Français Formidable*. The transnational connections that are most prominent, are the common francophone identity, and the interest in voluntary work all over the world.

All persons introduced are French-speaking and come from various countries in the francophone world (there is also a boy with a French mother and a Danish father). In the volume for grade 8, there is a page showing young people from France, Switzerland, Tunisia and Morocco, and the title is: "On est tous francophones" (we are all francophone). So, there is an emphasis on the common identity of being French-speaking (*Français Formidable* 2B: 35).

The other issue that is prominent in *Français Formidable* is voluntary work of different kinds, both national and transnational. Among the topics related to this are: *Les Restos du Coeur* (Restaurants of the Heart: free meals and other support of the poor), *Le Cirque du Soleil* and work for homeless people. As regards more international and transnational work, two topics are treated: *La Légion Étrangère* (The Foreign Legion) and *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF – Doctors without Borders). Young people wanting to join these organisations explain why. In relation to MSF, there is a world map which shows some places where they have made a difference: Haiti, South Africa, Somalia, Italy and Afghanistan.

As *A Piece of Cake*, *Français Formidable* does not contain any references to the UN, the EU or similar international/transnational organisations or institutions.

So, transnationality may be said to be oriented towards the young traveller in *A Piece of Cake*, whereas transnationality is more oriented towards the engaged youth wanting to do voluntary work around the world in *Français Formidable*.

## **8. *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable*: Is history, particularly (post)colonial history, represented?**

### **8.1. *A Piece of Cake***

Language textbooks, and especially those that deal with the teaching of widely used languages such as English and French, should include a historical dimension of some weight. Firstly, because the students should have some knowledge about the reasons for the wide use of their target language. Secondly, because they should also have some knowledge about the particular target-language country they are dealing with: Is it a former colony? Is it a former colonial power? What does this mean today? Are there important postcolonial issues (for example: migration from former colonies to the centre)?

*A Piece of Cake* very clearly focuses on the contemporary world, supplemented with a few short accounts of local history. There is practically nothing about the history of Britain, neither the internal history of the British Isles nor the history of the British Empire in Europe and overseas. The song ‘Rule Britannia’ is quoted, but the students are not asked to investigate its content, but just asked to sing it, while standing. The students are advised to search for information on Britain on an English website (Woodlands Junior School, Project Britain), but this site does not include topics like colonialism and the British Empire.

USA is approached in a totally different way: the focus is on the many tribes of First Americans and their fate since the arrival of Europeans, including the reservations and the forced relocations. Hawaii is also approached through topics related to the indigenous Hawaiians and their language and songs. Georgia is introduced by a couple of pages on its history from the time before colonisation over slavery on the cotton plantations, the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan, Martin Luther King to modern Georgia’s industry and agriculture (Jimmy Carter) and Atlanta’s Major League sports teams.

The few historical accounts in *A Piece of Cake* do not give the teacher and the students much help in contextualising texts and topics. Macro-history is absent. Terms like the

British Empire, Dominions and the Commonwealth are not used or explained. Thus, the students of English are not expected to get any insights into the historical background of the fact that the English language is so widely used in the world today.

## 8.2. Français Formidable

As can be seen in the overview of chapters above, *Français Formidable* contains four chapters on French history. The first chapter covers two pages including illustrations, and tells about the Celts, Charlemagne, William the Conqueror, the Hundred Years' war and the Edict of Nantes. The major events are put on a timeline with centuries. On the net, there is a page referring to important events in Danish history. The students are asked to print it out and cut it into pieces in order to put the Danish events correctly on the same timeline, beside the French events. So, students are asked to combine their knowledge of Danish and French history.

The second chapter deals with the Sun King, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and French colonisations (*la colonisation française*). Like the other sections, this section is quite short, and runs (my translation into English): "France takes colonies in two stages. The first colonisation is in North America in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, French is still spoken in Quebec. The second colonisation happens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in West and North Africa." (*Français Formidable* 1B: 69). When various French-speaking countries are introduced in other chapters, the students are usually told whether the country in question was a colony, and if so, what year it gained its independence.

The third chapter deals with the two world wars (and Charles de Gaulle and Jean Moulin), and the fourth chapter deals with the wars in Indochina and Algeria, and with May 68 (and Simone de Beauvoir).

So, there is in *Français Formidable* an intention of giving students some basic information on French national history and French colonisations through the centuries, although very brief and limited to the 'French' world: There is nothing about all the wars and conflicts France has had with Britain and most other colonial powers over the colonies. It should also be noted that the main point of view is that of the coloniser: "France takes colonies ...", see translation above. But at any rate, the students will have some knowledge of the reasons why French is spoken in Quebec and in many African countries, and in some other places around the world.

## 9. Discussion: Two language textbooks – two images of the world

It must be stressed that this is an analysis of two *examples of textbooks*, for use in Denmark with students in lower secondary. There are other textbooks available in Denmark, and at any rate textbook production changes somewhat over the years according to shifting ideas and interests among authors and editors. The purpose of the present analysis is not to evaluate the most recent publications but to illustrate the method and the educational reflections implied.

So, the two textbooks do not represent 'English teaching' and 'French teaching' in Denmark (or Scandinavia). On the other hand, they do not step outside what is normally expected of textbooks for the two languages. They are popular among teachers. In my



view, the comparison may lead to some hypotheses that could be investigated in a larger study – in Denmark or more broadly.

It should be said that the comparative approach emphasises differences rather than similarities. *A Piece of Cake* and *Français Formidable* are in fact similar in many respects. The popular geopolitics of these textbooks, like many other language textbooks (Risager 1991; Gray 2010; Risager 2018), foreground the positive sides of life in contrast to negative or problematic sides. Problematic issues are sometimes present in today's textbooks, but the general picture is that life is happy, promising, with very little conflict, with very few allusions to more serious political engagement, and with no misunderstandings or hard feelings in interpersonal and intercultural communication. In the following, I will focus on – and hypothesise about – the differences, in this case the different images of the world in the two textbooks.

The important thing here is that we are not only dealing with two languages: English and French, but with two narratives of the world and world history. Materially, it is the same world; what has happened in the world, has happened. But this can be seen, and is seen, with very different eyes, from a multitude of different perspectives and embedded in very different discourses and world views. So, whose narratives do we see in the two textbooks?

The textbooks have been produced in Denmark (and before that, in Sweden), so basically it is a Scandinavian perspective in a very broad sense – a perspective from Northern Europe, today a rich and privileged part of the world, dominated by a white, secular population who is used to travelling freely around the world, using English, and perhaps in some cases also French. Within this perspective, the authors have imagined a British and a French perspective: They start in Britain (not in Nigeria or Pakistan), and they start in France (not in Niger or Haiti).

Who in Britain would tell exactly the narrative that we find in *A Piece of Cake*? Those who are mostly interested in English as the world language for tourism and business? Those who are fascinated by the promises of neoliberal globalisation (cf. Gray 2010)? It is difficult to answer these questions, but at any rate it is not those who are interested in global inequality and the challenges of the developing world as one of the consequences of European colonialism. The lack of interest in Africa (except South Africa) is a sign of this. In the selection of countries in *A Piece of Cake*, one can see a reflection of the old colonial order: First Britain as the colonising centre (and the USA, who gained their independence from Britain); then the white colonies – later called British Dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Newfoundland, and Ireland; then India/Pakistan, who were also Dominions for a short period; and in the end the colonies in Africa, for whom there is no room in *A Piece of Cake*.

Who in France would tell exactly the narrative that we find in *Français Formidable*? Those who are convinced that it is important to keep the Francophonie together and strengthen it as a defense against the English-dominated world? Maybe as an alternative world – with French names for all places, cf. the world map? Those who have become aware that, due to population growth in many parts of Africa, the number of French daily speakers in Africa is going to far outnumber those in Europe and North America? For example, it is estimated that in 2050, 85% of all French speakers will reside in Africa

(OIF 2018). Francophone Africa is certainly included. But on the other hand, the narrative in *Français Formidable* is not about the economic and social consequences of colonialism. The countries are introduced as former colonies, now independent, and this is done respectfully, as on an equal footing with France, and with no hint at any postcolonial/decolonial issues. At the same time, there is no trace of the exoticisation of indigenous people as in *A Piece of Cake*; actually indigenous peoples are nowhere mentioned. For example: Native Americans and Inuits in Canada/Quebec are not mentioned. But it should be added that those who would tell the narrative in *Français Formidable* are interested in global issues that require some sort of international or transnational assistance, and if possible: voluntary work. Thus, Doctors without Borders is emphasised but, interestingly enough, only one francophone country is mentioned among the countries that have received their help: Haiti, in connection with the earthquake in 2010.

### 10. Conclusion: Language textbooks and popular geopolitics

Language textbooks are cultural products and play a part in the general cultural politics of our contemporary world. We cannot know how students receive the images of the world in the two selected textbooks, unless we study this specifically. But the books have been produced and distributed on the market, and thus they have been and are in circulation in our society (in Denmark, at least).

The analysis above shows that it is important to be aware of differences among the various languages in which popular geopolitics is modelled. An aspect of this is of course the semantics and pragmatics of the individual languages, but it is also central to look at the position of the languages in the global linguistic landscape that has developed as a result of world history. English and French are not just two languages, but two major tokens of the European/American competition over world power during the last two centuries. English won – but will it be challenged? When will the teaching of English begin to be a defense for the English-language (and particularly American) understanding of the world, in the light of growing Chinese dominance?

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